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TAGS: [EAID](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [ZI](#) [MDC](#)
SUBJECT: BULAWAYO AND MASVINGO'S MDC MAYORS ON CHALLENGES
OF GOVERNING: GOZ'S THE BIGGEST

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher W. Dell under Section 1.4 b/d

11. (C) Summary: During a recent trip to south-central Zimbabwe, the Ambassador met with the mayors of Bulawayo and Masvingo on February 8 and 9 respectively. Both mayors are members of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Mayor Japhet Ncube of Bulawayo criticized the central government for micromanaging municipalities, especially those governed by the MDC, and for failing to provide financial support to city governments. He named urban issues such as lighting, water and streets as major concerns, and said that voters are aware that the GOZ is in large part to blame for such problems. Ncube fully expects the MDC to win big in Matabeleland in the upcoming parliamentary elections.

12. (C) Summary Continued: Mayor Alois Chaimiti of Masvingo cited food security as the single biggest issue affecting the city. He noted that the GOZ was not only failing to help local governments, but was also constraining their ability to raise needed revenue from other sources. He added that the MDC would launch its national campaign in Masvingo February 20 and said the party stood a good chance of picking up additional seats in the region. End Summary.

Bulawayo Mayor: Tense Relations with GOZ; Matabeleland to remain MDC

13. (C) Mayor Ncube told the Ambassador that the central government tried to manage local authorities at every turn. He referenced a fax he had received the previous Friday requesting that all mayors attend a lunch in the capital in honor of the newly appointed Vice President, Joyce Mujuru. The GOZ expected mayors to attend on short notice and at their own expense. The Mayor said he had sent his deputy in his stead, indicating his distain for the central government,s behavior. He also cited the fact that correspondence from the central government came to him via the Governor, an appointed official and a member of the ruling ZANU-PF party.

14. (C) Mayor Ncube also criticized the central government for failing to make good on its financial promises. The Governor of the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe, Gideon Gono, recently pledged 150 billion Zim dollars to Bulawayo. The Mayor had yet to receive official notification of Gono,s bequest, let alone see any of the cash. Based on past experience, he said he did not expect the money to be forthcoming. Ncube said that while Bulawayo received little from the central government, its needs were significant. The Ambassador asked Mayor Ncube how he would spend money if he had it, and the mayor named roads, street lighting, and the sewer and water systems as priorities. With a population that had expanded to two million people, he said Bulawayo,s overtaxed infrastructure was in desperate need of revitalization.

15. (C) On an even more basic level, Ncube said that the city could not feed itself and that nationally Zimbabwe would need to import hundreds of thousands of tons of grain to avoid a crisis. Ncube expressed concern that ZANU-PF had exploited similar situations in the past, providing food to those who vote for the ruling party. The fact that war veterans handled food rationing in Bulawayo, even though this fell within the city council,s purview, provided yet another example of the central government,s on-going effort to control local authorities and their constituents.

16. (C) Despite tense relations with the central government and a severe lack of resources, Ncube said the situation was far from hopeless. To begin with, the city council realized that people might point fingers at them when visible issues such as lighting and refuse removal were ignored, so they had developed a plan to ensure that the central government took the blame, including a bi-annual city hall paper, &Masiye Pambili,8 that listed accomplishments as well as areas for improvement.

17. (C) Politically, Ncube said Matabeleland remained an MDC stronghold. He noted two reasons for optimism in the province. First, he felt confident that the people of

Matabeleland would vote MDC again since they were accustomed to the threats that came with supporting the opposition. Second, he thought ZANU-PF supporters in Matabeleland were so disenchanted that they simply wouldn't go to the polls. He added that ZANU-PF was in such chaos that he wouldn't be surprised if the parliamentary elections scheduled for March 31 were postponed.

Masvingo Mayor: More Trouble with GOZ; MDC Electoral Hopes

18. (C) The Mayor of Masvingo, Alois Chaimiti, and six of ten city councilmen, all of whom are members of the opposition party MDC, told the Ambassador that Masvingo would have the honor of hosting the launch of MDC's campaign on February

20. The Mayor said he was confident that the party would break through and win a number of rural seats in the region in the parliamentary elections. He allowed that intimidation and violence were very real possibilities as the elections approach. He also noted that previously used ZANU-PF tactics, including tearing up candidates, nomination papers and barring voters from going to the polls, could affect the outcome if deployed. Like Mayor Ncube, he believed the ruling party could also use food as a tool to get votes as they have done in the past.

19. (C) Chaimiti expressed the same frustration felt by Mayor Ncube over the central government's unfulfilled promises of funding and echoed the sentiment that no funds would actually be dispersed. He said Masvingo needed help in many areas but he flagged food security as the principle concern. Food scarcity cut across all wards, and affected rural as well as urban areas. Chaimiti explained that low salaries and joblessness in the region made it difficult for people to afford food.

10. (C) Overall, Chamiti said Masvingo was a distressed community whose economic base was being eroded by bad government policies. For instance, the GOZ had only allowed municipalities to raise budgets by 15%, a much lower increase than the percentages originally promised and grossly insufficient given current inflation rates. The policies of the central government constrain the city's ability to raise revenue on its own, making it impossible to provide adequate services to meet citizens' needs.

10. (C) Chaimiti said the support of the international community was key to encouraging democratic change in Zimbabwe. In that regard, he lamented the decline of NGO involvement in the Masvingo region, faulting primarily the central government for pushing out programs that had benefited the disadvantaged.

Comment

11. (C) The GOZ's hostile attitude toward MDC-led city governments is a consistent theme in our visits to various parts of the country. The ZANU-PF led GOZ has severely constrained the cities, former authorities to raise revenues, leading to cutbacks in services that the official media then portrays as signs of MDC incompetence. Ncube has been the most successful of the MDC mayors at fighting back and ensuring his voters are wise to the game, but our sense is that city residents in general are aware of this dynamic and that the MDC therefore stands a good chance of retaining its urban support base. In addition, the fortitude and creativity of both Mayor Ncube and Mayor Chaimiti in the face of significant problems gives reason for optimism that if the MDC were ever to come to power nationally, it would have a cadre of experienced administrators it could draw on to run the central government.

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